

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

STANLEY HUFF,

Plaintiff,

Case No. 1:17-cv-337

v.

Honorable Robert J. Jonker

MICHAEL ENGRAM et al.,

Defendants.

OPINION

This is a civil rights action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. The Court has granted Plaintiff leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. Under the Prison Litigation Reform Act, PUB. L. NO. 104-134, 110 STAT. 1321 (1996), the Court is required to dismiss any prisoner action brought under federal law if the complaint is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2), 1915A. The Court must read Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint indulgently, *see Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519, 520 (1972), and accept Plaintiff's allegations as true, unless they are clearly irrational or wholly incredible. *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25, 33 (1992). Applying these standards, Plaintiff's action will be dismissed for failure to state a claim.

Factual Allegations

Plaintiff currently is incarcerated in the West Shoreline Correctional Facility. He sues Michigan Parole Board Chairman Michael Engram and Parole Board Members Sonia Warchuck and Abigail Callejas for alleged violations of his state and federal rights arising from the denial of his parole.

Plaintiff was convicted by a jury in the Kent County Circuit Court on two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct for which he was sentenced on August 14, 2000, to concurrent prison terms of 11 to 45 years. Plaintiff also pleaded guilty in the Kent County Circuit Court to one count of first-degree home invasion and one count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, for which he was sentenced on October 24, 2005 to concurrent prison terms of 6 to 20 years and 9 to 45 years, respectively. On June 1, 2016, Plaintiff had a parole interview with Defendant Callejas. On June 16, 2016, the Michigan Parole Board issued a decision denying Plaintiff's parole with reconsideration on October 14, 2017. (*See* Parole Board Notice of Decision, ECF No. 1, PageID.7.) Plaintiff contends that the Defendant Callejas violated state statutes governing parole proceedings by using historical information to make her decision. He further claims that the Defendant parole board members violated his due process rights by relying on inaccurate or false information in denying his parole.

Plaintiff seeks a declaration that Defendants violated his state and federal rights in the parole proceedings. He also requests a preliminary and permanent injunction preventing Defendants from violating his rights in future parole proceedings. In addition, Plaintiff seeks compensatory and punitive damages.

Discussion

Plaintiff challenges the denial of his parole by members of the Michigan parole board. A challenge to the fact or duration of confinement should be brought as a petition for habeas corpus and is not the proper subject of a civil rights action brought pursuant to § 1983. *See Preiser v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 475, 484, 494 (1973) (the essence of habeas corpus is an attack by a person in custody upon the legality of that custody and the traditional function of the writ is to secure release

from illegal custody). The Supreme Court has held that a state prisoner cannot make a cognizable claim under § 1983 for an alleged unconstitutional conviction or for “harm caused by actions whose unlawfulness would render a conviction or sentence invalid” unless a prisoner shows that the conviction or sentence has been “reversed on direct appeal, expunged by executive order, declared invalid by a state tribunal authorized to make such determination, or called into question by a federal court’s issuance of a writ of habeas corpus” *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994) (citation omitted); *see also Edwards v. Balisok*, 520 U.S. 641, 646-48 (1997). However, in *Wilkinson v. Dotson*, 544 U.S. 74, 81-82 (2005), the Supreme Court clarified the *Heck* rule, finding “that a state prisoner’s § 1983 action is barred (absent prior invalidation) – no matter the relief sought (damages or equitable relief), no matter the target of the prisoner’s suit (state conduct leading to conviction or internal prison proceedings) – if success in that action would necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of confinement or its duration.”) (emphasis in original). Plaintiff does not seek release from prison; rather, he requests that Defendants be enjoined from violating his right in future parole proceedings. As a consequence, under *Wilkinson*, his success in the action would not necessarily demonstrate the invalidity of his continued confinement, so his action does not appear to be *Heck*-barred. Nevertheless, assuming that Plaintiff’s action is cognizable under § 1983, it fails to state a claim.

A complaint may be dismissed for failure to state a claim if it fails ““to give the defendant fair notice of what the . . . claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.”” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007) (quoting *Conley v. Gibson*, 355 U.S. 41, 47 (1957)). While a complaint need not contain detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff’s allegations must include more than labels and conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555; *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009)

(“Threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice.”). The court must determine whether the complaint contains “enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face.” *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 570. “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679. Although the plausibility standard is not equivalent to a “‘probability requirement,’ . . . it asks for more than a sheer possibility that a defendant has acted unlawfully.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 678 (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556). “[W]here the well-pleaded facts do not permit the court to infer more than the mere possibility of misconduct, the complaint has alleged – but it has not ‘show[n]’ – that the pleader is entitled to relief.” *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 679 (quoting FED. R. CIV. P. 8(a)(2)); *see also Hill v. Lappin*, 630 F.3d 468, 470-71 (6th Cir. 2010) (holding that the *Twombly/Iqbal* plausibility standard applies to dismissals of prisoner cases on initial review under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915A(b)(1) and 1915(e)(2)(B)(i)).

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege the violation of a right secured by the federal Constitution or laws and must show that the deprivation was committed by a person acting under color of state law. *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); *Dominguez v. Corr. Med. Servs.*, 555 F.3d 543, 549 (6th Cir. 2009). Because § 1983 is a method for vindicating federal rights, not a source of substantive rights itself, the first step in an action under § 1983 is to identify the specific constitutional right allegedly infringed. *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994).

Plaintiff claims that Defendants violated his due process rights in his parole proceedings by violating state law and relying upon false and inaccurate information in making their decision to deny his parole. To establish a procedural due process violation, a plaintiff must prove

that (1) he was deprived of a protected liberty or property interest, and (2) such deprivation occurred without the requisite due process of law. *Club Italia Soccer & Sports Org., Inc. v. Charter Twp. of Shelby*, 470 F.3d 286, 296 (6th Cir. 2006); *see also Swihart v. Wilkinson*, 209 F. App'x 456, 458 (6th Cir. 2006). Plaintiff fails to raise a claim of constitutional magnitude because he has no liberty interest in being released on parole. There is no constitutional or inherent right to be conditionally released before the expiration of a prison sentence. *Greenholtz v. Inmates of Neb. Penal & Corr. Complex*, 442 U.S. 1, 7 (1979). Although a state may establish a parole system, it has no duty to do so; thus, the presence of a parole system by itself does not give rise to a constitutionally protected liberty interest in parole release. *Id.* at 7, 11; *Bd. of Pardons v. Allen*, 482 U.S. 369, 373 (1987). Rather, a liberty interest is present only if state law entitles an inmate to release on parole. *Inmates of Orient Corr. Inst. v. Ohio State Adult Parole Auth.*, 929 F.2d 233, 235 (6th Cir. 1991).

In *Sweeton v. Brown*, 27 F.3d 1162, 1164-65 (6th Cir. 1994) (en banc), the Sixth Circuit, noting “the broad powers of the Michigan authorities to deny parole,” held that the Michigan system does not create a liberty interest in parole. The Sixth Circuit reiterated the continuing validity of *Sweeton* in *Crump v. Lafler*, 657 F.3d 393, 404 (6th Cir. 2011). In *Crump*, the court held that the adoption of specific parole guidelines since *Sweeton* does not lead to the conclusion that parole release is mandated upon reaching a high probability of parole. *See id.*; *see also Carnes v. Engler*, 76 F. App'x 79, 80 (6th Cir. 2003). In addition, the Sixth Circuit has rejected the argument that the Due Process Clause is implicated when changes to parole procedures and practices have resulted in incarcerations that exceed the subjective expectation of the sentencing judge. *See Foster v. Booker*, 595 F.3d 353, 369 (6th Cir. 2010). Finally, the Michigan Supreme Court has recognized that there exists no liberty interest in parole under the Michigan system. *Glover v. Mich. Parole Bd.*, 596 N.W.2d 598, 603-04 (Mich. 1999).

Until Plaintiff has served his maximum sentences, he has no reasonable expectation of liberty. The discretionary parole system in Michigan holds out “no more than a mere hope that the benefit will be obtained.” *Greenholtz*, 442 U.S. at 11. The Michigan Parole Board’s failure or refusal to consider Plaintiff for parole, therefore, implicates no federal right. In the absence of a liberty interest, Plaintiff fails to state a claim for a violation of his procedural due process rights.¹

Plaintiff also contends that Defendants violated state law in denying his parole. Claims under § 1983 can only be brought for “deprivation of rights secured by the constitution and laws of the United States.” *Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. 922, 924 (1982). Section 1983 does not provide redress for a violation of a state law. *Pyles v. Raisor*, 60 F.3d 1211, 1215 (6th Cir. 1995); *Sweeton v. Brown*, 27 F.3d 1162, 1166 (6th Cir. 1994). Plaintiff’s assertion that the Defendant parole board members violated state law therefore fails to state a claim under § 1983. Moreover, to the extent that Plaintiff seeks to invoke this Court’s supplemental jurisdiction over a state-law claim, the Court declines to exercise jurisdiction. In determining whether to retain supplemental jurisdiction, “[a] district court should consider the interests of judicial economy and the avoidance of multiplicity of litigation and balance those interests against needlessly deciding state law issues.” *Landefeld v. Marion Gen. Hosp., Inc.*, 994 F.2d 1178, 1182 (6th Cir. 1993). Ordinarily, where a district court has exercised jurisdiction over a state-law claim solely by virtue

¹The Court further notes that members of a parole board have absolute immunity from damages liability for actions taken in the performance of their duties regarding the decision to grant or deny parole because that task is functionally comparable to that of a judge. *Hawkins v. Morse*, No. 98-2062, 1999 WL 1023780, at *1 (6th Cir. Nov. 4, 1999); *Tillman v. Price*, No. 96-2032, 1997 WL 225993, at *1 (6th Cir. May 5, 1997); *Ward v. Moss*, No. 94-1417, 1994 WL 664948, at *1 (6th Cir. Nov. 23, 1994); *accord Scotto v. Almenas*, 143 F.3d 105, 110 (2d Cir. 1998); *Wilson v. Kelkhoff*, 86 F.3d 1438, 1444 (7th Cir. 1996); *Anton v. Getty*, 78 F.3d 393, 396 (8th Cir. 1996); *Little v. Bd. of Pardons, and Parole Div.*, 68 F.3d 122, 123 (5th Cir. 1995) (per curiam); *Russ v. Uppah*, 972 F.2d 300, 303 (10th Cir. 1992). The actions which Plaintiff complains were taken by Defendant Parole Board members in their quasi-judicial function of deciding whether to grant or deny Plaintiff’s parole; therefore, they are entitled to absolute immunity from Plaintiff’s claims for monetary damages.

of supplemental jurisdiction and the federal claims are dismissed prior to trial, the court will dismiss the remaining state-law claims. *Id.* Dismissal, however, remains “purely discretionary.” *Carlsbad Tech., Inc. v. HIF Bio, Inc.*, 556 U.S. 635, 639 (2009) (citing 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c)); *Orton v. Johnny’s Lunch Franchise, LLC*, 668 F.3d 843, 850 (6th Cir. 2012). Here, the balance of the relevant considerations weighs against the continued exercise of supplemental jurisdiction. Accordingly, Plaintiff’s state-law claims will be dismissed without prejudice.

Conclusion

Having conducted the review required by the Prison Litigation Reform Act, the Court determines that Plaintiff’s action will be dismissed for failure to state a claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2) and 1915A(b).

The Court must next decide whether an appeal of this action would be in good faith within the meaning of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3). *See McGore v. Wigglesworth*, 114 F.3d 601, 611 (6th Cir. 1997). For the same reasons that the Court dismisses the action, the Court discerns no good-faith basis for an appeal. Should Plaintiff appeal this decision, the Court will assess the \$505.00 appellate filing fee pursuant to § 1915(b)(1), *see McGore*, 114 F.3d at 610-11, unless Plaintiff is barred from proceeding *in forma pauperis*, e.g., by the “three-strikes” rule of § 1915(g). If he is barred, he will be required to pay the \$505.00 appellate filing fee in one lump sum.

This is a dismissal as described by 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g).

A Judgment consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Dated: April 28, 2017

/s/ Robert J. Jonker
ROBERT J. JONKER
CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE